Special Issue on the Nuclear Shelter Hearings

To "Stiffen National Will" the Kennedy Civil Defense Serves Up the Same Phony Figures As Ike's

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Like Watching A Lunatic Nightmare

The new civil defense program and the hearings which have just been held on it here by the Holifield subcommittee of House Government Operations are part of the Berlin crisis buildup. The intent is twofold: to make the Russians believe we are ready to risk our population rather than give way on Berlin and to make our people believe shelter may easily, quickly and cheaply be made available to protect them from thermonuclear war. In the language made fashionable by the application of game theory to war, the purpose is to make the Great Deterrent credible, to make the Russians really believe we are prepared to risk national suicide to drive a hard bargain or make them back down. As Frank B. Ellis, the new director of Civil Defense Mobilization (OCDM) put it grandiosely to the Holifield subcommittee at the opening of the hearings, in civil defense we are dealing not only with "the survival of this nation" but—

"We are also dealing with the National Will—that somewhat intangible ingredient which charges the environment of our daily life, either positively or negatively and which marks the difference between a leader of nations and a second-class power. If we are to remain true to our heritage of freedom and face up to the problems of our time, we must take reasonable measures for the protection of our civilian population. The taking of such measures symbolizes our determination to react positively to the Soviet challenge, rather than to choose the part of piecemeal surrender. In the critical days and months to come, I shall, under executive leadership address myself to the stimulation and the strengthening of the National Will."

A Bismarckian Mystique

Bismarck would have admired this mystique. It sees civil defense as a means of total emotional mobilization. The conception of civil defense as a means of making it possible to skirt closer to the brink for purposes of hard bargaining was outlined by Herman Kahn in his Rand Corporation (Air Force) study of "Non-Military Defense." In it he said that civil defense "might increase U.S. freedom of action in conducting peacetime foreign policy and implementing a broad deterrent strategy. . . . In the years ahead, willingness to make foreign policy decisions carrying a risk of war may be important to meet major Soviet challenges. . . . Deterrence of extremely provocative enemy behavior *other than direct attack on the United States* might thus be maintained as a credible national policy." The phrase italicized might have been written with a future Berlin crisis in mind. Kahn put his meaning more plainly in his book, *On Thermonuclear War,* when he said, "We must convince the Europeans as well as the Russians of our resolve if we are to prevent appeasement *or an undue degree of accommodation."** (Our italics).

In his radio and TV speech on Berlin July 25, President Kennedy set this new civil defense effort in motion by saying

Better Stock A Spare Pair of Eyes

"The light from a nuclear explosion is dangerous to the human eye at ranges of many miles in event of bursts low in the atmosphere or on the surface, varying with visibility. At the test sites high density goggles were provided to the observers of nuclear tests, and there was an extensive warning system to prevent eye injury. Injury may range from a temporary flash blindness to burns on the retina. In the event of high altitude explosions of megaton bombs, that is, at 20 miles or so, the data from experiments during the tests above Johnston Island in 1958 show that burns to the retina can occur as far away as 300 nautical miles. In such high altitude explosions the light pulse is emitted very rapidly—much of it less than 0.015 second, the time required for the blinking of the eye. If one were looking in the direction of a very high altitude burst, the injury would be produced before the blink reflex could react to protect the eye."

—"The Effects of Nuclear Explosions" testimony by R. L. Corsbie before the Holifield committee, Aug. 4.

"In the event of an attack, the lives of those families which are not hit in a nuclear blast and fire can still be saved—if they can be warned to take shelter and if that shelter is available." The glad tidings with which the Secretary of Defense opened the Holifield hearings was that shelter spaces in event of war are already available for one-fourth our population. "The heart of the President's program," Mr. McNamara said, "is the identification, marking and stocking of available community shelter space in existing buildings throughout the United States. Our best estimate by extra-

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*** This aspect of the case for civil defense was discreetly passed over by Kahn in his own testimony before the Committee. No one asked him what he would regard as "an undue degree of accommodation" in the Berlin crisis. As this issue was being written, Premier Khrushchov in his TV address of August 8 said, "I should like to repeat once more that by concluding a peace treaty with the GDR [the East German regime], we do not intend to infringe upon any lawful interests of the Western powers. Barring of access to West Berlin, blockade of West Berlin is entirely out of question. All this is only a figment of imagination of those who want to incandesce the atmosphere in order to prepare war. . . ." The issue is not Berlin but whether we are prepared, by dealing with the GDR, to give it de facto recognition and with that to recognize the division of Germany and its present boundaries. This issue seems to us to call for discussion, debate and negotiation, not muscle-flexing; it is neither a matter of honor nor of clear national interest to change the present borders. One need only recall two world wars to wonder whether a united Germany is to the real interest of either East or West. These, the real factors of decision, are passed over in Kahn-style gamesmanship.**

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polation from pilot surveys made in the past is that this program will identify some 50 million usable shelter spaces, and will provide a minimum of shelter for approximately one-fourth of our population."

From Incubation to Action

OCDM Director Ellis expressed it more pompously. "As a result of the intensive planning, research and technological development done by OCDM and others over the past years," he told the hearing, "shelter is now ready to move from the incubation stage to the action stage, beginning logically with a program to identify and make use of the shelter potential of existing buildings (as I specifically recommended to the President). As a result of sample surveys conducted by OCDM, indications are that about one-fourth of our people could be adequately sheltered in this manner very quickly and at minimum expense."

This warms over and serves up again some very dubious figures put forward by Eisenhower's OCDM director, Leo A. Hoegh, more than a year ago. He told the Holifield subcommittee in March, 1960, that pilot surveys showed "that over 25 percent of the U.S. population could be accommodated by existing shelter space." The Holifield committee subjected this claim to devastating analysis in the report it filed July 1 last year on Civil Defense Shelter Policy. The report said Governor Hoegh's estimate was based on pilot surveys of existing structures in only four areas: Tulsa, Okla.; Montgomery, Ala.; Milwaukee, Wis.; and part of Contra Costa County, Calif. In examining the surveys for itself, the subcommittee found that only in Tulsa were there enough shelter spaces for 25 percent of the population. The spaces in Montgomery were only enough for 15 percent and those in Contra Costa County for 7½ percent of the population. The Milwaukee survey was limited to 183 structures in a 20 block area and provided no figures for the whole city.

The committee reported that "Governor Hoegh's oft-repeated estimate that 25 percent of the U.S. population can be sheltered in existing structures is not borne out by the pilot surveys"; that these constituted too small a sample on which "to base a firm estimate of total shelter availability" and that the numbers on which the estimate is based "fall far short of a realistic representation of existing conditions" since they refer to "unimproved shelter spaces" and "the term 'unimproved' refers mainly to habitability, not to shielding [against radiation]." "Moreover," the report said, "all four areas surveyed are in OCDM-designated target areas: two of the four (Milwaukee and Contra Costa County) are in so-called critical target areas." The report pointed out that "in the event of a nuclear war, structures in these areas are apt to be destroyed or severely damaged."

The subcommittee's final verdict last year on this whole program is still applicable to the program as refurbished by the Kennedy Administration. "Undue reliance," the committee concluded, "on existing structures which afford only modest shielding creates an illusion of security and severely understates the magnitude of the civil defense requirements." But neither Chairman Holifield nor any of his colleagues challenged these same estimates when put forward again by McNamara and Ellis. Indeed only one member of the subcommittee, Mrs. Martha W. Griffiths, a Democratic Congresswoman from Detroit, put sharp questions to them.

No one questioned McNamara on the most crucial point of all. He said "the size of the attack we are presuming here is a very large attack" but no one pressed him for specific figures. Yet without some idea of the size and character of the assumed attack it was impossible to assess the amount of shelter required against fallout and the size of the inescapable casualties from blast and fire. McNamara said 10 to 15 million lives could be saved by his program but he did not say what the losses would be. What of the rest of the 45 to 50 million people in these marked shelters? Would they be killed by blast and fire? And what of the 140 million people who did not get into shelters? How many of them did his computers say would die?

At one point McNamara said that in order to avoid confusing the planning on the local level "it would be wise to pick an attack that is both most likely and also the largest—

Irrelevant But Vivid Answer Dept.

Mrs. [Martha W.] GRIFFITHS (D. Mich.): How close could a 20-megaton bomb come to the Empire State Building and still have it remain an effective shelter?

Civil Defense Director [Frank B.] ELLIS: Well, that is a scientific question. And I have the answer to it. What a 20-megaton bomb would do insofar as blasting radiation [sic] is concerned, and what square mile it would affect, Herman Kahn states that if a 20-megaton bomb were exploded in the heart of Los Angeles and a man was standing on the outskirts of a California town 20 miles away by a window, he would be scorched to death.

—Holifield bomb shelter hearings, Aug. 2.

Herman Kahnisms

Long War Man: **"In the Rand Corporation I was known as a long war man because I studied wars that lasted two to thirty days. That was long as compared with the wars which last 30 minutes or two hours or eight hours."**

Some People Are Never Satisfied: **"It should be possible for any person to distinguish between wars which result, say, in 20 million dead Americans and wars which result in 40 million dead Americans, and to say if he has to choose . . . he prefers a war in which there would be 20 million dead Americans. Now it is practically possible for people to make that remark, you know, that they want to say, 'why should I have a war at all.'"**

Nixon Corrected: **Nixon was wrong in saying to Khrushchov, "We must live together or die together," Kahn said, "If you want to give an accurate remark you must start by saying we must live together or one of us will die."**

Cheerful News: **"You have arms control today in the sense that neither you nor the Soviets are building the most destructive [weapons] systems possible, as far as we know. There are systems which could be built which we are not building simply because nobody wants to own them."**

Concession: **"If somebody says, 'I would rather be Red than dead,' he is a coward, and I think very properly an object of contempt and and scorn. If somebody says, 'I would rather have everybody Red than everybody dead,' he is making a sort of a reasonable remark. You may not agree with it, but I would agree with it. I would rather have everybody Red than dead."**

Joke: **"I am not, of course, claiming that war, you know, would make people happier or more normal."**

—Herman Kahn at the Holifield hearings, Aug. 7.

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and I believe that the largest is the most likely—and base the local planning on that assumption." Perhaps the committee hesitated to draw him out because the figures would be so horrifying that it would undercut the committee's purpose. This Holifield committee has been trying for years to sell a shelter program. But casualties of the immensity involved here point not to a shelter program *but to the criminal insanity of not doing everything humanly possible to avoid a thermonuclear war.*

A Grimmer Picture Inside OCDM

Within the OCDM itself a grimmer picture is painted than the one given in the hearings. An unclassified but unpublicized study (Shelter OCDM-SA-61-12; Operations Research Office) dated June of this year studies four assumed levels of attack ranging from a small 400 megaton attack to a large 23,000 megaton. The largest attack, assuming no protection at all, would kill some 148 million of our people, or about 80 percent.

McNamara said marking existing shelters could save from 10 to 15 million lives, but a more optimistic estimate came from a later witness, Rogers Cannell, director of the Emergency Planning Research Center of the Stanford Research Institute, consultant to OCDM and to Adam Yarmolinsky, the official in charge at Defense Department. Cannell said from 15 to 35 million people could be saved by the program of marking existing shelter. But the OCDM report for inside distribution says, "The number of survivors added by marking would amount to 3 to 18 million." The best estimate in the OCDM report is that when "survivors in basement at random" are added, about 35 percent of our people (or 65 million) would emerge after it was over while 65 percent (or 120 million) would die.

To get the benefit of this marking program, people would have to be swift, daring and lucky. Why swift? When Mrs. Griffiths asked McNamara whether his program would provide "a sufficient shelter under a very heavy attack," the Secretary of Defense replied, "It depends on how much radiation they have absorbed prior to the time they reached the shelter. But assuming they have absorbed very little, yes." Why daring? Because the existing shelter is in large public and commercial buildings in the heart of our great cities. In those cities which were hit by bombs, these buildings would be death traps, not shelters. The buildings provide shielding against fallout when bombs have fallen elsewhere; they would become human incinerators under direct attack. This led Mrs. Griffiths to point out at the close of the McNamara hearing that the Detroit district she represents has not a single building adequate for shelter, that her people are 8 to 15 miles from shelter in downtown Detroit "and I doubt if you could get those people back down into a shelter, or if anybody in his right mind at the head of the line would be willing to try for the interior of Detroit." To make for shelter in the central city, if it was still there, would be to gamble that Detroit itself would not be hit next.

Why lucky? This brings up another point brought out

How to Be (Relatively) Lucky

". . . . in areas of relatively heavy fallout [after a thermonuclear attack], the ingestion of all the fallout on one square foot at one week after the fallout occurred might be sufficient to cause death to adults or children due to irradiation of the gastro-intestinal tract. Fresh milk might be so heavily contaminated with Iodine-131 that a single pint would contain enough activity to destroy an infant's thyroid gland.

"On the other hand, in dealing with this situation we will have to give up for the time being and perhaps for a generation or so the peacetime radiation protection criteria geared to the proposition of reducing the possibility of even delayed injury to close to zero. We would expect that the incidence of leukemia in the surviving population would be increased, probably by a factor of several for a few decades and then taper off. A similar increase in bone cancer (but a smaller number of cases) might appear later as a result of the unavoidable ingestion of strontium-90 in food over the ensuing years.

"Neither condition, I hasten to add, would be likely to become a principal cause of death. It is unlikely that even leukemia would become as common as fatal diphtheria was in 1900, or scarlet fever or whooping cough. It would also be possible that a relatively high incidence of thyroid cancer would occur in those who had been infants or small children at the time and who had inadvertently ingested appreciable quantities of radio-iodine.

"When compared to the immediate deaths and injuries from blast and fire which would wipe out tens of millions of people, these delayed effects, although they might involve several hundred thousand persons, over a number of years would be relatively small. . . ."

—Dr. Charles L. Dunham, director Division of Biology and Medicine, AEC, testifying August 4 before the Holifield shelter hearings. Dr. Dunham, who strongly resembles Dr. Pangloss in Voltaire's Candide in his capacity for finding everything for the best (relatively) in this (relatively) best of all possible worlds, may be remembered from his optimistic testimony in earlier years on the fallout problem. Dr. Dunham was a leading spokesman for the AEC's radiation-is-good-for-you thesis (relatively, that is).

Why No "Knowledgeable, Intelligent" Person Need Be Seriously Hurt by H-Bomb

"Survival depends on how much this man has found out about weapons effects, about the precaution he takes, and above all what he has actually done. For instance a shelter with a shielding factor of 100 makes the radiation tolerable. Because of the slower rate of delivery of thermal energy from the high yield weapons, he can reduce effectively the number of calories hitting him if he ducks behind something opaque. After a few seconds the bulk of the thermal energy will have been emitted and he then has about two minutes to get to a place where he'll be safe from flying glass and other missiles created by the blast wave which travels at the speed of sound. Depending on the meteorological conditions, of course, the fallout could be expected to arrive in around 20 minutes to an hour and continue to fall for about 2 to 6 hours. Thus it can be seen that the effects of a detonation of 20 megatons as experienced at 25 miles do not confront our man simultaneously. If he knows the sequence of events, and if he knows what he has to do to survive, he has time to act. He does have to act correctly the first time or take the consequences.

"At such distances few knowledgeable, intelligent people need be hurt seriously."

—R. L. Corsbie, deputy director, biology and medicine, AEC, testifying on "The Effects of Nuclear Explosions" before the Holifield civil defense hearings, Aug. 4.

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New Delusion: Evacuating People Into, Instead of Out of, the Cities

by Mrs. Griffiths. Many months ago OCDM gave up the once highly advertised idea of evacuating cities; there simply is not warning time enough. People in the open countryside, even if they reached it, would escape death from blast and fire storm only to risk death from fallout. But this new marking program rests on the obverse of the evacuation fallacy, on what might be called evacuation inward instead of outward. To get the benefit of exisiting shelter in the downtown areas, millions of people from the outlying home and suburban districts would have to be brought into the city. This colloquy occurred:

Mrs. Griffiths: Do you think that the rush back to the city would be any more practical than the rush out?

Mr. McNamara: Yes. The rush out from the city is [im?] practical simply because of the time. The possibilities of obtaining sufficient warning time to permit evacuation are very low, in my opinion. But the possibilities of obtaining time to move into the marked shelters are very high, and certainly warrant the very, very low expense of marking and stocking the shelters.

Cheap—And Not Worth Much

To say that the program "warrants the very, very low expense of marking and stocking the shelters" seems weakly to admit that these shelters and the chances of reaching them aren't worth too much. "What if the attack occurred at night?," when most people are out of the center city, Mrs. Griffiths asked. "Approximately the same number," McNamara replied would be saved. It takes little imagination to envision the panic, the jammed streets, the abandoned subways. By day or night, how would the shelter spaces be apportioned? When would the doors be shut? How would the mobs left out be controlled? And who can believe that the great cities would not be hit, the basic assumption of this whole program? The OCDM study already referred to says our ten largest urban areas contain 35 percent of our manufacturing capacity and 25 percent of our people; the 100 largest, two-thirds of our manufacturing capacity and one-half our people. What folly to assume that people can find shelter in these prime targets! On the second day of the hearings there was this exchange with Ellis:

Mrs. Griffiths: I would like to ask you if this shelter program is for all practical purposes a tacit abandonment of the hit cities?

Mr. Ellis: I would not say so. I would say that everything has to have a beginning.

Mrs. Griffiths: I would agree with you that it is a beginning. But I would like to point out to you that a shelter program that is not fully available to all is, for practical purposes, a selective shelter program. That is at 3 o'clock in the morning in every major city in America, if the best shelters are large downtown buildings, the people that you will save will be skid row drunks, prostitutes, a few people in hospitals.

Mr. Ellis: Yes.

Mrs. Griffiths: Maybe, the night shift on newspapers.

OCDM Director Ellis, the stiffener of the National Will, is a cheerful fellow. When Holifield asked him whether the Kennedy program like Eisenhower's would still depend largely on the states and local governments to finance shelters, Ellis ducked the question and went into a pun we could do without. He said the Federal government might match funds spent by hospitals and said the Hotel Dieu in New Orleans "operated by the Sisters down there" wanted OCDM to put up 50 percent of the money for "a tremendous annex." Ellis said no funds or authority for such help was available but suggested such a program "probably in church construction throughout the nation [for shelters], coupled with a real church revival in the area of survival and, coining a phrase, you would have a revival for survival in America." Our country's destiny could not be entrusted to a gayer fellow.

I will have more to report on these hearings next week. I want only to say now that I cannot find words to express the anguish I felt in working on this story. It was as if I were watching a lunatic nightmare.

More Reassuring All the Time

"In the proposal for furnishing food [to shelters] . . . here is an area in which it might be reasonable to propose . . . a large element of self-help . . . these people have to feed themselves anyway. . . .

"I notice the 5-day provision there [in Secretary McNamara's statement]—of course, 5 days, I think two weeks would be nearer the time that might be required, particularly in heavy [fallout] areas. . . . However I am also aware of the fact that recent tests have shown that people can live for 30 days without food if they have plenty of water."

—Rep. Holifield, Civil Defense hearings, Aug. 1.

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